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File: USPT

Jun 18, 2002

US-PAT-NO: 6408282

DOCUMENT-IDENTIFIER: US 6408282 B1

TITLE: System and method for conducting securities transactions over a computer network

DATE-ISSUED: June 18, 2002

INVENTOR-INFORMATION:

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NAME	CITY	STATE	ZIP CODE	COUNTRY	TYPE CODE
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APPL-NO: 09/292553 [\[PALM\]](#)

DATE FILED: April 15, 1999

PARENT-CASE:

This application claims benefit to U.S. Provisional No. 60/122,208 filed Mar. 1, 1999.

INT-CL-ISSUED: [07] [G06 F 17/60](#)US-CL-ISSUED: [705/37](#); [705/36](#)US-CL-CURRENT: [705/36R](#)

FIELD-OF-CLASSIFICATION-SEARCH: [705/36](#), [705/37](#)
See application file for complete search history.

PRIOR-ART-DISCLOSED:

U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS

Search Selected

Search ALL

Clear

	PAT-NO	ISSUE-DATE	PATENTEE-NAME	US-CL
<input type="checkbox"/>	3573747	April 1971	Adams	705/37
<input type="checkbox"/>	5809483	September 1998	Broka et al.	705/37
<input type="checkbox"/>	5873071	February 1999	Ferstenberg et al.	705/37
<input type="checkbox"/>	5924082	July 1999	Silverman et al.	705/37
<input type="checkbox"/>	6014643	July 1999	Minton	705/37

<input type="checkbox"/> <u>5950177</u>	September 1999	Lupien et al.	<u>705/37</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> <u>6012046</u>	January 2000	Lupien	<u>705/37</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> <u>6243691</u>	June 2001	Fisher et al.	<u>705/37</u>

FOREIGN PATENT DOCUMENTS

FOREIGN-PAT-NO	PUBN-DATE	COUNTRY	CLASS
0407026	September 1991	EP	
WO9506918	March 1995	WO	
WO9634357	October 1996	WO	
WO9852133	November 1998	WO	

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

"Morgan Stanley Deploys Black Box Trading System"; May 1991; Trading Systems Technology; Dialog file 636, Accession No. 01493468.*

Louis; "New breed of ECNs competes for market share"; Nov. 1998; Wall Street and Technology Online Trading Supplement PP: 16-17; Dialog file 15, Accession No. 01726082.*

Resnick; "Serial portfolio. (Online securities trading) (including listing of products and services"; Dec. 1992; Computer, V14, n11, p90(4); dialog filw 148, Accession No. 06184981.*

Lehman "Trading and liquidity on the Tokyo Stock Exchange: a bird's eye view"; Jul. 1994, Journal of Finance, v49, n3, p951(34); Dialog file 148, Accession No. 0752021.

ART-UNIT: 2163

PRIMARY-EXAMINER: Hafiz; Tariq R.

ASSISTANT-EXAMINER: Jeanty; Romain

ATTY-AGENT-FIRM: Pennie & Edmonds LLP

ABSTRACT:

The system and method of the preferred embodiment supports trading of securities over the Internet both on national exchanges and outside the national exchanges. The preferred embodiment supports an improved human interface and a continuous display of real-time stock quotes on the user's computer screen. The ergonomic graphical user interface (GUI) of the preferred embodiment includes several functional benefits in comparison with existing on-line consumer trading systems. In the preferred embodiment, the users are subscribers to a securities trading service offered over the Internet. Preferably, each subscriber to this service is simultaneously connected from his own computer to a first system which provides user-to-user trading capabilities and to a second system which is a broker/dealer system of his/her choice. The system providing the user-to-user trading services preferably includes a root server and a hierarchical network of replicated servers supporting replicated databases. The user-to-user system provides real-time continuously updated stock information and facilitates user-to-user trades that have been approved by the broker/dealer systems with which it interacts. Users of the preferred system can trade securities with other users of the system. As part of this user-to-user trading, a user can accept a buy or sell offer at the terms

offered or he can initiate a counteroffer and negotiate a trade.

7 Claims, 71 Drawing figures

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L6: Entry 21 of 27

File: USPT

Jan 25, 2005

DOCUMENT-IDENTIFIER: US 6847938 B1

TITLE: Method of exchanging goods over the internet

Abstract Text (1):

A method and system is taught for coordinating the exchange of goods between parties over a communications network such as the internet. Users of the system can interact with a central computer to input data regarding items that they offer for exchange, as well as search criteria describing items that they would like to receive in exchange. A processor in the central computer searches records stored in a database to find and sort those records that satisfy the user's search criteria. A second test is then performed to determine whether the information that the user input describing the item offered for exchange satisfies search criteria within the record. As a result, a match may be generated between two users who have input complementary criteria. The invention can also accommodate more complex exchanges between three or more parties.

Brief Summary Text (3):

The present invention relates generally to electronic commerce transactions. Specifically, the invention relates to a method and system for using the internet or similar network to coordinate exchanges of items between parties.

Brief Summary Text (5):

Before the internet became popular, an individual who wanted to sell or exchange a personal item could do little more than place an advertisement in the "Classifieds" section of the local newspaper. The market would thereby be limited to the newspaper's readership. For those who wished to exchange certain types of commonly-exchanged items ranging from books and CDs to time-shares, clubs formed that allowed members to swap such items amongst themselves. But such clubs were also confined to local areas since the logistics and long distance communication required to arrange frequent exchanges was impractical.

Brief Summary Text (7):

Since the pervasiveness of the internet has exploded to what it is today, a number of methods have been developed to help individuals conduct simple transactions over the internet. For example, computer-based classified ads and electronic bulletin boards exist in great numbers, providing people with places to post their advertisements. A number of systems exist wherein would-be sellers enter ads into a computer-managed database that can be searched by prospective buyers. Online classified ad systems are effective for those who want maximum exposure for their listings since they provide a highly visible place to post ads. Classified ads, however, are best suited for one-time transactions in which the seller is looking to sell her product, and proceeds from the sale can be used to cover the costs of placing the classified ad. Moreover, the classified ad method of conducting business consists of one-sided, seller-driven transactions since the advertising party simply posts an advertisement and waits to be contacted. Consequently, even simple exchanges of items, as between two parties, cannot easily be arranged through classified ads.

Brief Summary Text (8):

Online auctions have become extremely popular of late since the internet

facilitates the accepting of bids from anywhere in the world. Many internet sites allow individuals to place virtually any item up for sale to the highest bidder. Several systems exist that employ computers to process bid information from bidders spread over a wide area. Others teach systems for conducting real-time auctions over the internet. The auction-method of transacting business is very efficient and accurate in establishing the value of an object for sale. However, auctions are limited to one-time buying/selling transactions, as the winning bidder is simply the person who agrees to pay the highest price. As with online classified ads, online auctions do not satisfy the needs of people who wish to swap items on a regular basis; nor are they used to offer an item for anything other than cash.

Brief Summary Text (9):

The success of online classified ads and auctions shows how drastically the internet has increased the power individuals have in conducting their personal business. Anyone can take advantage of the internet's global scale to instantly and inexpensively advertise items on a national or worldwide scale. Conversely, people in search of particular items now have vastly more options to choose from. But along with this enormous increase in options come the difficulties associated with efficiently finding and managing them. A person could spend hours online searching through multitudes of items before finding exactly the right item.

Brief Summary Text (10):

A number of systems have been developed to efficiently sort through buying, selling, and exchanging opportunities. The general goal of such efficiency-enhancing search systems is to enable users to quickly and easily find precisely the item they are looking for without having to sift through incredible amounts of clutter. The relevant "user" is almost always a buyer or a seller, but may in some cases, be someone looking to exchange or swap items.

Brief Summary Text (11):

Computer-assisted systems for interactively brokering goods and services between potential buyers and sellers have been proposed. Such systems facilitate buying/selling transactions for a wide variety of goods and services by first storing information about the seller's item, and then assisting buyers in searching the database based on criteria important to the buyer. Seller-driven systems such as these are by far the most common and take many forms including the classified ads and auctions discussed above.

Brief Summary Text (15):

While existing exchange systems generally provide a marketplace for persons interested in acquiring and disposing of various items, they generally do not broker exchanges of like items between individuals. The old-fashioned book club where members meet to swap books they have read has not been displaced by the advent of the internet. There is no forum on the internet that allows the local book club to extend its reach, and more importantly, no system for implementing such a forum has been developed. Moreover, existing systems do not actually perform automated matching of multiple parties with complementary criteria.

Brief Summary Text (18):

Accordingly, the present invention is directed to a system for automatically coordinating exchanges of items between individuals that substantially obviates one or more of the problems due to limitations and disadvantages of the related art.

Detailed Description Text (3):

The present invention is generally a system that coordinates exchanges of items between individuals without the requirement that money actually change hands. Through an internet site, an individual seeking to take part in a trade can be automatically matched to another individual with a complementary position. For example, Party 1 having Item A and desiring to swap Item A for Item B could be matched by the system to Party 2, who is registered within the system as owning

Item B and desiring Item A. The system can also accommodate multi-party exchanges where three or more parties are involved in the exchange.

Detailed Description Text (4):

In its preferred embodiment, the present invention takes advantage of the global presence of the internet by allowing users to interact with the system via an internet site. Although the characteristics and design of the internet site may vary widely, the site essentially provides input fields where users input information about the item they wish to trade, and information about the item or items they wish to acquire. The internet site can display other information including, but not limited to, the results of the system's efforts to arrange a satisfactory match, the status of a user account, and the availability of items for exchange.

Detailed Description Text (5):

By incorporating an internet site as the user interface to the system, the present invention ensures that any user with a computer and internet browser software can take advantage of the invention. Moreover, because users can interact by way of the internet, users need not live close to each other to effect an exchange. Exchanges are coordinated by the system and communicated to the relevant users via the internet. If tangible items such as books are involved, users can then exchange their items through the mail or similar system. For non-tangible items such as time-shares, the electronic record of the agreement may be sufficient to effect the exchange.

Detailed Description Text (6):

The system preferably employs a searchable database to record users' information regarding items possessed and items desired. The extent of other information that must be recorded will depend upon the nature of the items being exchanged. For example, for books, title and author may be all that is required. On the other hand, exchanges of time-shares would typically require information concerning location, amenities, and periods of availability. User information, usually at least name and address, may also be recorded so the exchange can be performed once it has been arranged by the system. In addition, more detailed user information such as a history of transactions may also be stored, thus enabling the system to track user trends and characteristics, and predict future exchanges of interest to the user to increase the efficiency with which the user interacts with the system.

Detailed Description Text (7):

In one embodiment of the present invention, the system may be a feature of an online club (e.g., an online CD exchange club). The club may require that users pay a fee to become members, where the fee is used to guarantee exchanges. For example, if a member entered into an exchange without actually possessing the item he committed to providing, his fee could be used by the club to purchase a new version of the same item so that the other party to the exchange is protected. The club may also add a nominal surcharge to each transaction to maintain the system and promote the club for its own growth. In other embodiments, the system of the present invention maintains an accounting of member fees to ensure that members who engage in exchanges are active, that is, paid in full to date. The system of the present invention may also be part of a club that functions on a point system, where members can be credited or assessed points that may be exchanged at some later time for items in the club's inventory or items possessed by other club members.

Detailed Description Text (8):

As will become apparent, the present invention can be utilized in a broad range of contexts. The items that can be exchanged with the present system include, but are not limited to, books, compact discs, games, videos and movies, collectible articles, event tickets, and time-shares. In addition, the system is not limited to the exchange of like items (i.e., books for books, videos for videos, etc.), and is not limited to the one-for-one exchanges (i.e., one book for one book). The present

invention is also not limited to simple exchanges between two parties. The system can be constructed with software that allows exchanges between three or more parties. Generally, the present invention can be employed to exchange any items that lend themselves to being swapped.

Detailed Description Text (16):

In the first step 7 of the flowchart of FIG. 2, the user inputs information regarding the item being offered for exchange. If the present invention is being employed as an online book exchange club, for example, the item would be a book and the information input would typically consist of at least the title and author. In some cases, more detailed information such as the edition or year of printing may be necessary to accurately describe the book. In the case of a time-share, more detailed information would be required, such as the location, address, amenities and features, dates of availability, etc. Once the user has input the information, it may be stored immediately, stored later, or not stored at all. If stored immediately, as depicted in box 14 of the alternative embodiment of FIG. 3, a record can be created in the database corresponding to a new entry wherein would be stored the user's item information and information regarding the user, if that information is known at the time. Alternatively, the user's item information may be conditionally or temporarily stored, or perhaps no action would be taken yet. For example, the user's information may not have to be stored until after the search is performed. Alternatively, storage of the user's information may be contingent upon the user entering valid search criteria and/or password.

Detailed Description Text (17):

The second step 8 is for the user to input her search criteria regarding an item she would like to receive in exchange for the item she is offering for exchange. Considering the online book club again as an example, the search criteria may specify an author name if the user is only looking for another book by the same author; or it may include a title or more specific criteria. In the case of time-shares, the search criteria would again have to be more elaborate, possibly including a requisite geographic area, number of bedrooms, or period of availability. Moreover, as explained above, this information may be written to a database record at this point or later. In the preferred embodiment, the website contains fields wherein the user inputs her information and search criteria. The website also contains a <SEND> button, or similar device that initiates the transmission of the information, that allows the user to transmit all the data she has entered to the central computer instantaneously once she is finished entering it. In this case, the information and the search criteria would be stored virtually simultaneously upon receipt at the central computer.

Detailed Description Text (19):

In the preferred embodiment, the database would be searched by analyzing existing records in the database to determine the degree to which they satisfy the user's search criteria. In another embodiment, however, a reverse search may be done where the user's information regarding the item she offers for exchange is compared to the search criteria associated with each record in the database to determine whether her item satisfies the search criteria of any existing records. The search criteria of existing records stored in the database will be discussed in more detail below.

Detailed Description Text (21):

Another possible embodiment employs a hybrid of searching and browsing where the system allows the user to choose a category of records to browse, thereby eliminating the need to browse every record. For example, the system may define categories of books such as Shakespearean plays, Charles Dickens novels, and romance novels. This modified browsing technique allows users to look at all of the records within a well-defined category based on author, subject matter, or other classification. As a result, a user can manually review a subset of records for something appealing when the user does not exactly know enough of what she is

looking for to input accurate search criteria.

Detailed Description Text (22):

In another embodiment of the present invention, a more sophisticated and efficient artificial intelligence searching technique may be used wherein the system accumulates detailed user information regarding past transactions and areas of interest. This information can then be used by the system to track trends regarding individual users and broader categories of users. Trending information can be used to predict future transactions of interest to particular users. Such a system would result in more efficient user interaction because users can quickly be steered to transactions that are most likely to be of interest, or users may be automatically informed by the system of potential exchanges. For example, the system would receive information from a user and then, based upon stored user information and using artificial intelligence techniques known in the art, the system can notify users that there has been a recent posting to the system that may be of interest.

Detailed Description Text (26):

If a particular record meets the user's search criteria, the next step 11 is to determine whether the item that the user is offering for exchange satisfies the other party's request. For example, assume a user offers for exchange the movie The French Connection and enters search criteria indicating that he would like to exchange The French Connection for any murder mystery novel. Assume also that, during a search, the processor encounters a record wherein a second user has indicated that she owns the murder mystery novel Worst Fears Realized by Stuart Woods and her search criteria indicate that she wants to exchange that book for another book that is currently on the New York Times Best Seller list. In that case, the record meets the first user's search criteria in box 10; however, box 11 is not satisfied because the movie The French Connection is not a book on the New York Times Best Seller list. Consequently, the test of box 11 would be failed and the processor would return to box 9 to continue searching until there were no more records to be searched. Only if the tests of both box 10 and box 11 are passed will the system generate a match 12.

Detailed Description Text (30):

Once a match has been generated and, if applicable, accepted by the user, both parties involved will be notified 13. Parties may be notified, for example, by displaying the information on the system's website or by sending an e-mail message to the users. The notification itself should include sufficient information such that the parties can thereafter execute the exchange. At a minimum, such information will probably include the other user's name and address so that the parties can exchange their items through the mail. Telephone numbers may also be provided if necessary for the parties to finalize their exchange. The exact information needed to inform the users will depend upon the context in which the present invention is being implemented. In another embodiment, such information may include a user identification of some sort such as a screen name, login name or other unique personal identifier, if users do not need or want to use their real names. It is also possible to make displaying of match information contingent upon the user accepting the record as a match, or perhaps upon entering a valid password, as explained above. The user information that is provided as part of the step of notifying the users may itself be included within the record selected as a match, or it may be stored separately, such as in a separate member file, and associated with the record. If the present invention is implemented as an online book exchange club, members may be listed with their address and telephone numbers in a membership file, while their postings are listed in a separate database. Such an arrangement would enable the system to separately keep track of active and inactive members. It would also allow members to place multiple requests in the database so that they could be involved in multiple independent transactions simultaneously.

Detailed Description Text (31):

While the preferred embodiment of the present invention is directed towards exchanges where two users swap items with each other, with additional programming, the system can be made to arrange exchanges involving three or more parties. If a search is completed based on a first user's search criteria but yields no exact matches, the system can be programmed to produce approximate matches, as described above. The processor may then do an analysis of the approximately matching records to determine whether any two or more records in combination satisfy the user's search criteria. For example, in an implementation of the present invention as an online music club that exchanges CDs currently on the Billboard.TM. Top 200 Albums, assume a first user offers the music CD "Supernatural" by Santana and inputs search criteria specifying that she would like to exchange that CD for "Devil Without A Cause" by Kid Rock. During the processor's search of the database records, it comes across a record wherein a second user has indicated that he possesses "Devil Without A Cause" and would like to exchange it for "Mirrorball" by Sarah McLachlan. Depending upon the exact characteristics of the system's sorting techniques, the processor may assign this record a statistical ranking somewhere between 50 and 80 percent since it contains information related to "Devil Without A Cause". It therefore satisfies the first user's criteria, but does not have its own criteria satisfied. Consequently, it is not a perfect match, but it can be designated a potential alternative match. If the processor also encounters a record wherein a third user has indicated that she owns "Mirrorball" and would like to exchange it for "Supernatural", this record also will be designated a potential alternative match since it contains information regarding one of the first user's criteria, namely "Supernatural". Once all the records have been searched and no perfect match has been found, the processor will perform an additional analysis step in which it finds that the two records, each of which only partly satisfying the first user's search criteria, completely satisfy the first user's criteria when taken together. Following the processor's arrangement of this 3-way exchange, the three users will be notified in the manner described above and instructed where to send their CDs to perfect the exchange.

Detailed Description Text (32):

From the preceding example of a 3-way exchange it should be apparent that, with minimal modification, the system can be programmed to accommodate a wide variety of items for exchanging in a wide variety of contexts. The preceding examples have been presented strictly illustrative purposes and in no way are intended to limit the possible applications of the present invention. There is no need to limit use of the present invention to simple exchanges of books for books, CDs for CDs, and so on. The system's programming can easily be made to arrange more complex transactions. In addition, transactions involving four or more parties could also be coordinated given software that is robust enough to do so. As a result, it should be apparent from the preceding description and examples that the concepts of the present invention have great potential for application beyond the examples presented herein.

Issued US Cross Reference Classification (2):

705/37

Field of Search Class/SubClass (3):

705/37

CLAIMS:

1. A method for coordinating an exchange of items between individuals over a communications network, said method comprising: providing, maintaining, and updating a preexisting list of like items being offered for exchange, wherein the steps of providing, maintaining, and updating are performed by a third party; receiving a first data entry identifying a first offered item being offered for exchange by a first user, wherein the first data entry comprises the first user's selection of the first offered item from the preexisting list of like items being

offered for exchange; receiving first search criteria identifying a first desired item to be received in exchange for the first item by the first user, wherein the first search criteria is generated by the first user's selection of the first desired item from the preexisting list of like items being offered for exchange; storing the first data entry and the first search criteria in a database component of a central computer system; receiving a second data entry identifying a second offered item being offered for exchange by a second user, wherein the second data entry comprises the second user's selection of a second offered item from the preexisting list of like items being offered for exchange; receiving second search criteria identifying a second desired item to be received in exchange for the second item by the second user, wherein the second search criteria comprises the second user's selection of the second desired item from the preexisting list of like items being offered for exchange; searching the database in accordance with the second search criteria and the second data entry; generating a match if the first data entry satisfies the second search criteria and if the second data entry satisfies the first search criteria; informing the second user whether a match has been generated; and storing the second data entry and the second search criteria in the database if no match has been generated.

14. The method of claim 1 wherein the preexisting list of like items consists of like items selected from the group consisting of: a book, a compact disc, a video, a game, and a computer software program.

21. A system for coordinating the exchange of items between individuals via a communications network, said system comprising: a central computer; a plurality of remote terminals, each of said remote terminals having input devices for entering data; a data communication network providing a signal path for data exchange between said central computer and said plurality of remote terminals; a processor located at said central computer; an interface located at said central computer, said interface being controlled by said processor, wherein said interface is capable of providing data to and receiving data from said remote terminals; a data storage device connected to said central computer, said data storage device being controlled by said processor, and said data storage device storing data records comprising information related to at least one of: items offered for exchange, requests for items to be exchanged, descriptions of items, and user identification; and a preexisting list of like items being offered for exchange that is provided, maintained, and updated by a third party; said central computer receiving a data entry identifying an item offered for exchange that is on the preexisting list of like items being offered for exchange and search criteria relating to a desired item requested for exchange that is on the preexisting list of like items being offered for exchange input at one of said plurality of remote terminals by a first user, the search criteria generated by the first user's selection of an item from the preexisting list of like items being offered for exchange; said processor analyzing the data records to determine whether the received search criteria are satisfied by information contained in the data records provided by a second user who previously identified an item offered for exchange and a desired item, both from the list of like items, and said processor further analyzes the data records to determine whether search criteria associated with the data records are satisfied by the received data entry; said processor selectively retrieving a data record that: (1) satisfies the received search criteria of the first user, and (2) is satisfied in its search criteria by the received data entry; and said processor providing information contained in the selectively retrieved record to the first user.

25. The system of claim 21 wherein the information contained in the selectively retrieved record comprises information related to at least one of (1) an item description, (2) item availability, and (3) conditions on use of an item.

29. The system of claim 21 wherein the first user must enter a valid password before the system will accept the input of data relating to an item offered for

exchange and search criteria relating to a desired item requested for exchange.

30. The system of claim 21 wherein the list of like items consists of like items selected from the group consisting of: a book, a compact disc, a video, a game, and a computer software program.

33. A method for conducting an online exchange club wherein users access a central computer via a communications network, store in a database associated with the central computer information identifying items they would like to exchange with other users and items they would like to receive in exchange, and wherein the central computer automatically matches users who have input complementary information, said method comprising: providing access to a central computer via a communications network; providing, maintaining, and updating a preexisting list of like items being offered for exchange, wherein the steps of providing, maintaining, and updating are performed by a third party; receiving a data entry from a first user identifying an item offered for exchange, wherein the data entry is comprised of the first user's selection of an item from the preexisting list of like items being offered for exchange; receiving search criteria from the first user identifying an item from the preexisting list of like items being offered for exchange; searching records in a database associated with the central computer for information that satisfies the search criteria, wherein the information comprises a data entry from a second user identifying an item offered for exchange and a desired item to be received in exchange, both items selected from the preexisting list of like items; analyzing the records to determine whether the received search criteria are satisfied by information contained in the records; analyzing the records to determine whether search criteria associated with the records are satisfied by the received data entry; selectively retrieving a record that: (1) satisfies the received search criteria, and (2) is satisfied in its search criteria by the received data entry; and displaying information related to the selectively retrieved records.

46. The method of claim 33 wherein the list of like items consists of items selected from the group consisting of: a book, a compact disc, a video, a game, and a computer software program.

47. The method of claim 33 wherein both the item being offered for exchange and the item desired in exchange are books.

48. The method of claim 33 wherein both the item being offered for exchange and the item desired in exchange are compact discs.

49. The method of claim 33 wherein both the item being offered for exchange and the item desired in exchange are videos.

50. The method of claim 33 wherein both the item being offered for exchange and the item desired in exchange are games.

51. The method of claim 33 wherein both the item being offered for exchange and the item desired in exchange are computer software programs.

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L7: Entry 131 of 136

File: USPT

Dec 3, 2002

DOCUMENT-IDENTIFIER: US 6489968 B1

TITLE: System and method for exposing popular categories of browse treeAbstract Text (1):

A computer-implemented process identifies popular nodes (items and/or item categories) within a browse tree or other hierarchical browse structure based on historical actions of online users, and calls such nodes to the attention of users during navigation of the browse tree. The system and method are particularly useful for assisting users in locating popular products and/or product categories within a catalog on an online merchant, but may be used with browse structures for navigating other types of content. Node popularity levels are determined periodically (e.g. once per day) based on recent user activity data that reflects users' affinities for specific nodes. Popular nodes are called to the attention of users, preferably by automatically "elevating" such nodes for display within the browse tree. The node elevation process may also be used to elevate nodes that are predicted to be of interest to a user, regardless of node popularity levels.

Brief Summary Text (2):

The present invention relates to browse trees and other types of hierarchical browse structures used to help users locate online content. More specifically, the invention relates to methods for automatically identifying and calling to the attention of users the nodes (categories and/or items) of a browse tree that are the most popular, or are otherwise predicted to be interesting to users.

Brief Summary Text (4):

With the increasing popularity of the Internet and the World Wide Web, it has become common for merchants to set up Web sites for marketing and selling products and services. One example of such a Web site is the online site of AMAZON.COM, the assignee of the present invention. Via this site, consumers can access and place orders from an online catalog that includes millions of book titles, compact discs, gifts, items for auction, etc.

Brief Summary Text (5):

Many online merchants and other businesses group their products, services or other items into a set of categories and subcategories of a browse tree. For example, the Yahoo Web site (www.yahoo.com) includes a browse tree which acts as a general Web directory, the Ebay Web site (ebay.com) includes a browse tree for locating auction-related content (auction events, etc.), and the Amazon.com Web site includes a subject-based browse tree for locating book titles.

Brief Summary Text (7):

One problem commonly encountered by online merchants is the inability to effectively present their goods and services to consumers via their browse trees. Due to the large number of items and item categories, many "popular" categories and items (those that have experienced significant user activity) remain hidden from the user. For example, when a user begins navigation of a typical browse tree for locating books, the user initially sees a list of categories that broadly describe different book subjects. At this point, the user normally would not see more specific categories such as "Olympics," even though "Olympics" may be the most popular category at that time. The "Olympics" category may be nested within the